Some remarks on the taxonomy of Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*, with particular reference to *C. n. jonesi* Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899

Guy M. Kirwan

Quelques remarques sur la taxonomie de l'Engoulevent de Nubie *Caprimulgus nubicus*, notamment en ce qui concerne *C. n. jonesi* Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899. Beaucoup a été publié sur les cinq sous-espèces de l'Engoulevent de Nubie *Caprimulgus nubicus*, dont l'aire de distribution s'étend du sud d'Israel à travers l'Arabie occidentale et le nord-est de l'Afrique jusqu'au Kénya, avec une population isolée à Socotra, Yemen. Des observations, enregistrements vocaux et photos récentes de cette dernière population, décrite comme *C. n. jonesi* à la fin du 19ème siècle sur la base d'un unique spécimen, permettent de réexaminer le statut taxonomique de cette forme. Puisque les caractéristiques utilisées pour distinguer *jonesi* de *C. n. torridus*, la forme occupant l'Afrique du nord-est avoisinante, se chevauchent, la présente note propose de considérer *jonesi* dorénavant comme un synonyme plus récent de *torridus.* Même entre les autres formes, les différences géographiques sont généralement assez faibles, et des opinions divergentes sur la façon de diagnostiquer les taxons ont été publiées. Le problème de la définition des limites des sous-espèces est aggravé par le manque de spécimens dans les musées d'au moins deux des formes, *taruensis* (occupant la Somalie du sud et le Kénya) et la forme nominale *nubicus* (du Soudan et l'extrême sud-est de l'Egypte). Les vocalisations des cinq taxons ne présentent apparemment pas de différences et les mouvements, mal connus, d'au moins deux d'entre eux, semblent indiquer que certains taxons se chevauchent dans une mesure plus ou moins large. L'auteur propose de considérer la plupart des variations dans le plumage de l'Engoulevent de Nubie comme des adaptations (parfois très localisées) aux conditions climatiques et à la nature du sol, et par conséquent (sous réserve d'études futures) ces variations sont peu utiles pour la détermination de divergences évolutives significatives et ne méritent donc pas de reconnaissance taxonomique. Malgré la relative absence de spécimens, l'auteur appuie l'avis exprimé dans la littérature que *taruensis* est un synonyme plus récent de *torridus* et recommande des études supplémentaires afin d'établir si *tamaricis* est véritablement distinct de *nubicus* et si *torridus* peut être distingué avec certitude de *tamaricis.* Pour des taxons nocturnes comme ceux-ci, les vocalisations doivent jouer un rôle primordial dans les études taxonomiques.

Summary. Much has been published on the five subspecies of the Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*, which range from southern Israel through western Arabia and north-east Africa south to Kenya, with an outlying population on Socotra (Yemen). Recent field observations, tape-recordings and photographs of the latter population, described as *C. n. jonesi* in the late-19th century on the basis of a single specimen, have permitted a reanalysis of the taxonomic status of this form. Because of overlap in features used to distinguish *jonesi* with those of *C. n. torridus*, from adjacent north-east Africa, I propose that *jonesi* be henceforth regarded as a junior synonym of *torridus.* Geographical variation within the other forms of *C. nubicus* is also generally rather weakly expressed, with several differences in opinion as to how taxa might be diagnosed having been suggested in the previous literature. The problems of assigning subspecific limits within this species is compounded by a lack of specimen material in the world's museums of at least two of these forms, *taruensis* (from southern Somalia and Kenya) and nominate *nubicus* (Sudan and extreme south-east Egypt). No differences in vocalisations between the five taxa are known and the movements of at least two, which are poorly understood, may mean that some taxa overlap to a greater or lesser extent. I suggest that most described variation in the Nubian Nightjar might be considered as (sometimes highly localised) responses to climatic and soil conditions, and, subject to future research, therefore of little use in determining significant evolutionary divergence and hence unworthy of taxonomic recognition. Despite the relative lack of specimen material, I support previous suggestions in the literature that *taruensis* is a junior synonym of *torridus*, and recommend that further work be carried out to determine whether *tamaricis* is definitely distinct from *nubicus* and whether *torridus* is safely distinguishable from *tamaricis*. In these and similar nocturnal taxa, vocalisations must assume a prominent role in taxonomic studies.

Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus* Lichtenstein, 1823, is a polytypic species known from the extreme southern Levant, western Arabia and north-east Africa, with seemingly anomalous records of unstated provenance from the Algerian/Libyan/Niger border region (Fry & Harwin 1988) and from Merzouga, southern Morocco, in spring 1984 (two sight records), although the latter are now considered unacceptable (Thévenot *et al.* 2003). Five taxa have been described: nominate *nubicus* from the Nile Valley of central Sudan and Gebel Elba, Egypt; *C. n. tamaricis* Tristram, 1864, from Israel (where it is now very rare), Jordan (only three definite records, all in 1963) and south-west Arabia, with some, at least, moving across the Red Sea to winter from south-east Egypt southwards; *C. n. torridus* Lort Phillips, 1898, from northern Somalia, central Ethiopia and north-west Kenya; *C. n. taruensis* van Someren, 1919, from southern Somalia and central and eastern Kenya (where it is perhaps only a non-breeding visitor); and *C. n. jonesi* Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899, from Socotra Island (Andrews 1995, Cleere & Nurney 1998, Holyoak 2001, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989, Shirihai 1996, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). There is no available evidence to suggest that the range of *tamaricis* is continuous along the eastern border of the Red Sea, as mapped by Cleere & Nurney (1998), in discrepancy with the text in the same work and Jennings (1995). Despite several recent overviews of the Caprimulgiformes (e.g. Cleere & Nurney 1998, Cleere 1999, Holyoak 2001), the authors of these works have generally been content to uphold the taxonomic *status quo* with respect to *C. nubicus*. The purpose of the following note is, particularly, to question the validity of *C. n. jonesi* and, more generally, to provide comments concerning the perceived diagnosability of the other subspecies.

The validity of *Caprimulgus nubicus jonesi*

Caprimulgus jonesi was described (as a new species) by Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes (1899) on the basis of an adult male taken in the 'Dimichiro Valley, Garieh Plain, E. Sokotra' on 16 January 1899. Thereafter, *C. n. jonesi* went unrecorded for almost a century, with the exception of sight records of unidentified nightjars in 1953 and March 1964 (Kirwan 1998), until it was seen, photographed and heard singing by R. F. Porter, S. Aspinall *et al.* during biodiversity surveys of the archipelago in the late 1990s. In addition, a road-killed example of this species was salvaged by the same observers north of Rookib, on 20 February 2000, and is now in the Natural History Museum, Tring (NHM), collection (but awaits a registration number). However, the specimen is in such bad condition that it has, unfortunately, extremely limited value as comparative material. The temporal status on Socotra is unclear because ornithological field work on the island is concentrated in the boreal autumn to spring, and the records are as yet too few to gain a true impression of this, but it is presumed to be resident and to breed on the island (Porter 2003). It is unclear whether Ogilvie-Grant and Forbes had opportunity to compare their specimen with *torridus*, which was named the previous year (Phillips 1898), but they described the novelty as follows:

> Nearest to *C. nubicus* from Arabia, Palestine, and North-east Africa, but at once distinguished by having the ground colour of the upper parts clear grey instead of sandy brown, and the markings on the top of the head and on the scapulars rufous and buff instead of whitish buff. The whole of the black markings on the upper parts are moreover, much coarser.

As is obvious from the photographs (Figs. 1–3) presented here, *jonesi* actually shares all of these 'distinguishing features' with *torridus*. Subsequent commentators have thus refined the characters that separate *jonesi* as follows. Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1952) considered it greyer than *torridus* with a distinct collar. Fry & Harwin (1988) considered *jonesi* to be like *torridus* but greyer, with a narrower half-collar, a diagnosis copied verbatim by Holyoak (2001). Cleere & Nurney (1998), however, regarded the differences from *torridus* to be the 'smaller tawny spotting on the scapulars and no heavy buff spotting on the wing-coverts.' Like the latter, I consider the type specimen of *jonesi* (NHM 1899.8.11.98), which is, apart from the wing of the road-killed example (see above), the only specimen material available for this taxon, to have both the ground colour of the upperparts and the depth of the buff-coloured half-collar closely comparable with a typical example of *torridus* depicted here (Fig. 2, from Balad or Balcad, southern Somalia, NHM 1982.3.53). Furthermore, the field photograph of *jonesi* obtained by S. Aspinall (Fig. 3) demonstrates that this form can possess quite marked buff spotting on the wing-coverts, and considerably more noticeable tawny-coloured scapular spotting than evident on the type. There may be a slight tendency for *torridus* to exhibit a more buff ground colour to the belly, and perhaps marginally more russet transverse barring to the same feather tract, but neither feature is necessarily constant and, as pointed out above, only the type specimen of *jonesi* is available as comparison. Even if proved to consistently differ from *jonesi* in such respects, nomenclatural recognition of the latter remains dubious. It should be remarked that available mensural data (wing and tail) for *jonesi* are within the range presented for *torridus*, although as noted by Holyoak (2001), those data for the latter form presented by Vaurie (1960) and Cleere & Nurney (1998) are at odds with those given by Fry & Harwin (1988). (The wing of the bird found dead on the road near Rookib, Socotra, measured 149 mm, and thus also within the range of *torridus.*) More importantly, the voice of *jonesi* reportedly does not differ from the typical double- or treble-noted song, slightly reminiscent of a distant yapping dog, given in Arabia (R. F. Porter, S. Aspinall pers. obs.), and apparently elsewhere in the species' range (see below). Given these data, it seems impossible to continue to recognise *jonesi*, and I recommend that the name be henceforth treated as a junior synonym of *torridus.* Considering the obviously close zoogeographical affinities between the Socotran archipelago and the Horn of Africa, such a finding is unsurprising.

Remarks on other subspecies

It is as well to provide some further remarks on the validity of the other named forms, based on a comparison of the following material in NHM: 28 *C. n. tamaricis*, 14 *C. n. torridus*, two *C. n. nubicus* and one *C. n. taruensis*, with an additional specimen of the latter held in the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren (RMCA), being examined on my behalf by R. Demey, and photographs of the holotype, held at the American Museum of Natural History, New York (AMNH) being supplied by S. Kenney. Further, S. Kenney provided me with representative photographs of a male specimen of *C. n. nubicus* (AMNH 633069, taken in Nubia, on 29 February 1904, and part of the Rothschild, Henley and Wollaston Collection) held at the same institution, which is apparently entirely typical of the series of nine specimens (six male) held in New York. In addition, I consulted the available literature, field photographs from Ethiopia, Israel, Kenya, Yemen and Gebel Elba, south-east Egypt (the latter posted at www.Birdingegypt.com), and my own field notes from Yemen. I omitted from my analysis eight specimens of *tamaricis* from Arabia taken by Meinertzhagen in the light of widespread doubts concerning the provenance of his material (see, e.g. Rasmussen & Prŷs-Jones 2003), although in the case of the present material a cursory examination did not suggest that the specimens might be fraudulent or in any other way problematic, and these all show the grey upperparts characteristic of this form. Given the ready availability of other material relating to this form, inclusion of potentially 'difficult' material was unnecessary. It is worth remarking on the comparative lack of specimen material available for some of these forms, which has also hampered previous commentators. The tiny sample sizes of *nubicus* and *taruensis* (as well as *jonesi*) make it difficult to provide in-depth commentaries on the validity of these taxa, but must also seriously call into question the ability of scientists to recognise and name them.

C. n. taruensis was described on the basis of ten specimens from the Taru desert to east Kilimanjaro, Kenya, by van Someren (1919), who considered it to differ from *torridus* in 'being more rufous on the wings and scapulars, and…smaller' (wing 146–150 mm compared to 152–157 mm; van Someren 1919). Although *taruensis* was considered a synonym of *torridus* by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1952), who failed to provide rationale for their views, this position was refuted by Vaurie (1960) on the basis of the darker and more chestnut wing spots and perhaps smaller size (although sample size was again tiny and measurements were, by now, known to overlap with *taruensis*). As a result, *taruensis* has been considered valid by many subsequent commentators, except Zimmerman *et al.* (1996), Cleere & Nurney (1998) and Cleere (1999), who again treated the name as a synonym of *torridus*, albeit without providing further evidence. Nonetheless, as noted by Holyoak (2001), published accounts of the distinctiveness of *taruensis* are at variance (Cramp 1985, Fry & Harwin 1988, Vaurie 1960). Like Cleere (1998, 1999), I do not find *taruensis* easily diagnosable and strongly uphold his view that it should be considered a junior synonym of *torridus*. The intensity of the rufous wing-covert spotting is very similar in *taruensis* and *torridus* (not appreciably darker and more chestnut in the former as claimed by Vaurie 1960), the one specimen of *taruensis* directly examined by myself was not paler grey than many of the *torridus* at NHM, neither is the half-collar brighter or broader in *taruensis* (both suggested by Fry & Harwin 1988 as valid differences). The field photograph presented here (Fig. 7) seems to confirm my views. That examined by R. Demey is a male and one of the paratypes of *taruensis* (RMCA 97594), collected by van Someren at Tsavo. According to RD the specimen closely matches the description by Fry & Harwin (1988) of either *torridus* or *taruensis*, except that it has a buffish-rufous upper breast-band between the white throat spots and the finely vermiculated breast (being a continuation of the nuchal collar but somewhat broader). The wing is 151 mm (i.e. well within the range of either race). The holotype (AMNH 633076, a male, from Tsavo, on 17 March 1918) is, in my opinion, equally difficult to differentiate from specimens of *torridus*. To confuse the issue further, Roselaar (in Cramp 1985) considered *taruensis* to have *paler* (my emphasis) rufous spotting than *torridus*, which merely proves how variable such features are in series. Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) mentioned rufous and dark morphs in *torridus*, of which the former is characterised by having 'most spots on wing-coverts deeper rufous', as well as being tinged cinnamon-rufous virtually throughout (and some of those held in NHM conform to this idea, see Figs. 11–12, although this might easily reflect a response to local soil conditions). Furthermore, mensural data (wing and tail) for the three *taruensis* examined by Vaurie (1960) are well within the range of *torridus* presented by Fry & Harwin (1988) and Cleere & Nurney (1998), and Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) also noted that this was the case.

The forms *tamaricis* and *nubicus* generally appear more easily diagnosable, but even here there is some disagreement in the literature. Thus, Holyoak (2001) found *nubicus* to have the 'upperparts and breast rufous-sandy, collar on hind-neck less conspicuous, spots on scapulars and wing-coverts larger, pink-cinnamon', a description with which both Cleere & Nurney (1998) and myself largely concur, although I do not consider the collar to be always less noticeable or narrower, and the latter authors also considered it to be 'broad'. Nonetheless, in some specimens (e.g. AMNH 633069), the collar is very restricted and poorly defined, agreeing with Fry & Harwin (1988), who described the collar as being much less obvious and who noted that the crown streaking is rather long and thin. However, as realised by Cleere & Nurney (1998), the latter might be equally stated to be a feature of *torridus*, albeit subject to variation, as some *torridus* exhibit almost no crown streaking (NHM 1923.8.7.4970, 1923.8.7.4972). Unlike Fry & Harwin (1988), I do not consider the spotting on the scapulars and wing-coverts of *C. n. nubicus* to be invariably less distinct than in *torridus*, but my small sample size must be borne in mind and in some instances (e.g. AMNH 633069) the differences can be striking. Finally, most specimens of this taxon in AMNH exhibit similar ground coloration, which is quite distinctly paler and sandier than *torridus* and other forms (see Fig. 4; S. Kenney *in litt.* 2004).

Fry & Harwin (1988) simply considered *tamaricis* to be 'greyer, less buffy' than *nubicus*, Cleere & Nurney (1998) thought it to be greyer than the nominate with the white tips to the outer tail feathers larger, and Holyoak (2001) found *tamaricis* to be much greyer and more heavily marked with black on the upperparts and breast, with contrasting large spots of chestnut or rufous-cinnamon on the crown, scapulars, wing-coverts and breast. There is some variation in most of these purported features. Some *tamaricis* at least (NHM 1896.2.18.14, 1948.58.23) can have a noticeably buffish breast, approaching *nubicus*, although the upperparts remain predominantly grey, not sandy as in *nubicus*. The spotting is consistently large and extensive on the scapulars and wing-coverts, but highly variable on the crown and breast, ranging from virtually none on either surface (e.g. NHM 1969.46.19) to rather extensive, being occasionally very densely spotted on the underparts (NHM

1948.58.23), although the majority might be considered intermediate in this feature. Thus, on the basis of dorsal colour alone *tamaricis* might prove diagnosable, but this is still dependent on examination of a larger series of *nubicus* than has thus far been available to museum workers, to prove that the upperparts are consistently sandy rather than grey. The evidence of the photograph taken by Gabriel Michael in November 2001 at Wadi Aideib, Gebel Elba, Egypt, suggests that some *nubicus* can be rather grey on the upperparts (see www.Birdingegypt.com). Equally, that *nubicus* is the only form present in south-east Egypt rests on the evidence of one specimen (see Goodman & Meininger 1989), and it seems plausible that *tamaricis* might also be present in this area in winter (see Movements). All of those I have observed in Yemen are rather grey dorsally, suggesting that *tamaricis* might be rather uniform in this feature. Additional specimens of *nubicus* are required to validate the potential difference in dorsal coloration. In sum, despite a relative lack of specimen material, I support previous suggestions in the literature that *taruensis* is a junior synonym of *torridus*, and postulate that further work is required to determine whether *tamaricis* is demonstrably distinct from *nubicus*.

Like *tamaricis*, *torridus* is a rather grey form. That the two are unequivocally distinct appears unclear on the evidence of those skins I have examined, especially given the presence of an apparent intermediate (see below). Further museum and field work is necessary on this issue.

Movements

Whilst most forms are considered to be resident, *tamaricis* is at least a partial migrant. Most of the, now tiny, population in Israel are probably summer visitors (Shirihai 1996) and there is quite some evidence of Arabian birds moving across the Red Sea to winter in Africa (Ash & Miskell 1998, Cramp 1985, Fry & Harwin 1988), whilst presumed migrants have been recorded in Oman in autumn (Eriksen & Sargeant 2000, NHM 1977.1.4, 1977.21.15), at which season there is also a claim from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Bundy *et al.* 1989). My search of the relevant published and some unpublished literature, and specimens, revealed very few Arabian records in November–January (e.g. Brooks *et al.* 1987), although it is unquestionably true that the species is likely to be distinctly less obvious during the non-breeding season (i.e. when not singing). Nevertheless, *tamaricis* certainly reaches some parts of the range of *torridus* in winter and perhaps even that of nominate *nubicus*. A male, taken by K. D. Smith near Archico, Eritrea, on 17 May 1953, and held at NHM (1953.35.9; Figs. 9–10) appears intermediate between *torridus* and *tamaricis* (as already observed by N. Cleere in a note in the collection), having white tips to the outer two tail feathers larger than in *torridus* but smaller than in *tamaricis* and rufous spotting on the upperparts

Captions to figures on pages 122 & 123

Figure 1. Type specimen of / Spécimen type de *Caprimulgus nubicus jonesi* (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum

Figure 2. Type specimen of *C. n. jonesi* (left) and specimen of *C. n. torridus*, from Balad or Balcad, southern Somalia (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum

Spécimen type de *C. n. jonesi* (à gauche) et spécimen de *C. n. torridus*, de Balad ou Balcad, Somalie du sud (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum

Figure 3. *C. n. jonesi*, Socotra (Simon Aspinall)

Figure 4. Specimen / spécimen AMNH 633069 of / de *C. n. nubicus* (Shannon Kenney, courtesy of The American Museum of Natural History, Department of Ornithology)

Figures 5–6. *C. n. torridus*, Nechisar National Park, Ethiopia, 19 February 1997 (Per Smitterberg)

C. n. torridus, Parc national de Nechisar, Ethiopie, 19 février 1997 (Per Smitterberg)

Figure 7. *C. n. taruensis*, Lake Baringo, Kenya, July 2003 (Marc Guyt/AGAMI Photo Agency)

C. n. taruensis, Lac Baringo, Kénya, juillet 2003 (Marc Guyt/AGAMI Photo Agency)

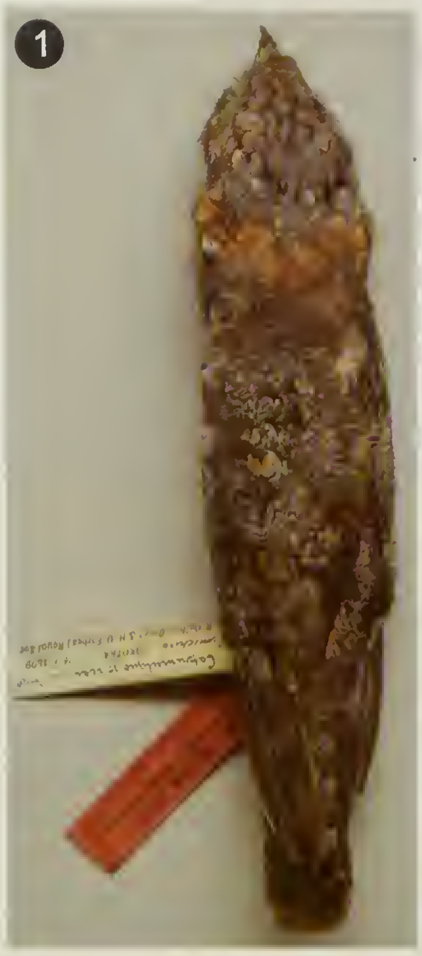
Figure 8. Specimens of / spécimens de *C. n. nubicus* (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum

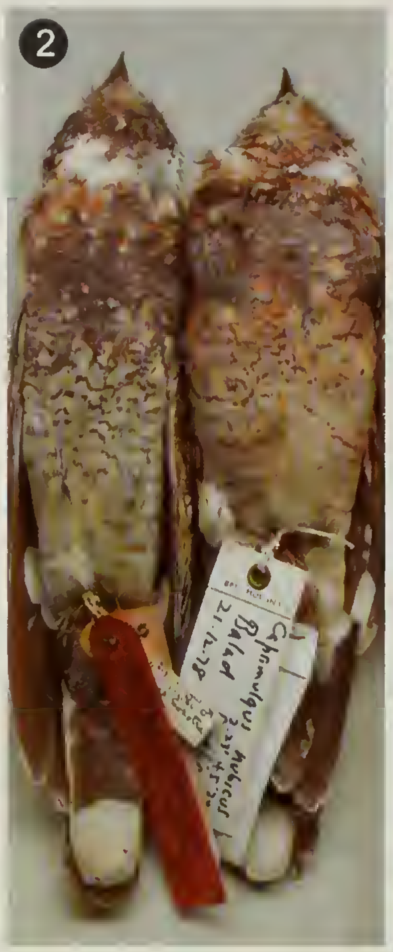
Figures 9–10. Apparent intermediate between *C. n. torridus* and *C. n. tamaricis* (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum

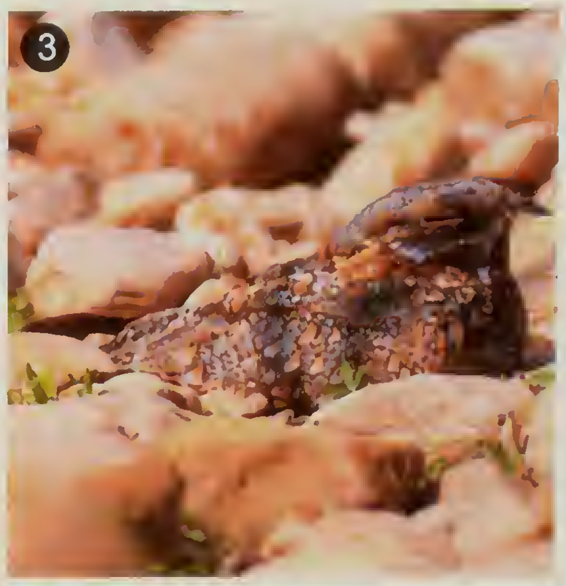
Spécimen apparemment intermédiaire entre *C. n. torridus* et *C. n. tamaricis* (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum

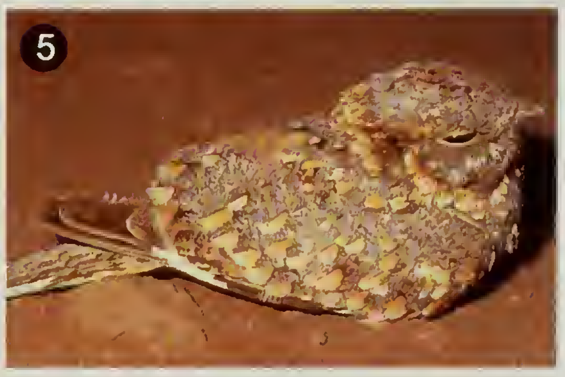
Figures 11–12. Two specimens of *C. n. torridus* (extreme left and right) flanking a *C. n. taruensis* (Guy M. Kirwan). Copyright The Natural History Museum. The bird on the left appears to be an example of the so-called rufous morph.

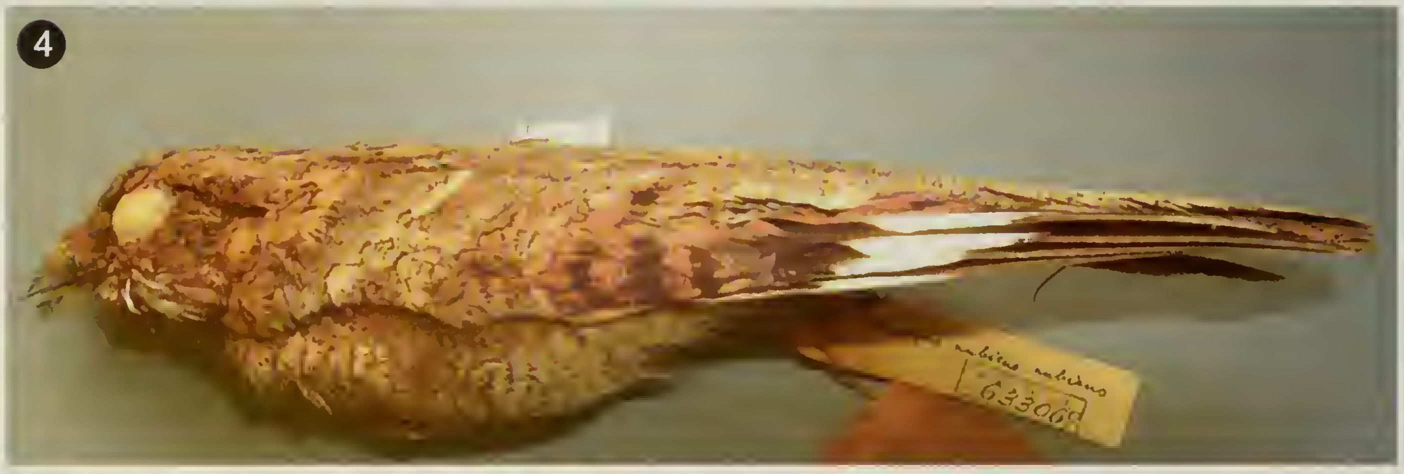
Deux spécimens de *C. n. torridus* (à gauche et à droite) avec un *C. n. taruensis* (au centre). L'oiseau de gauche semble appartenir à la forme dite rousse.

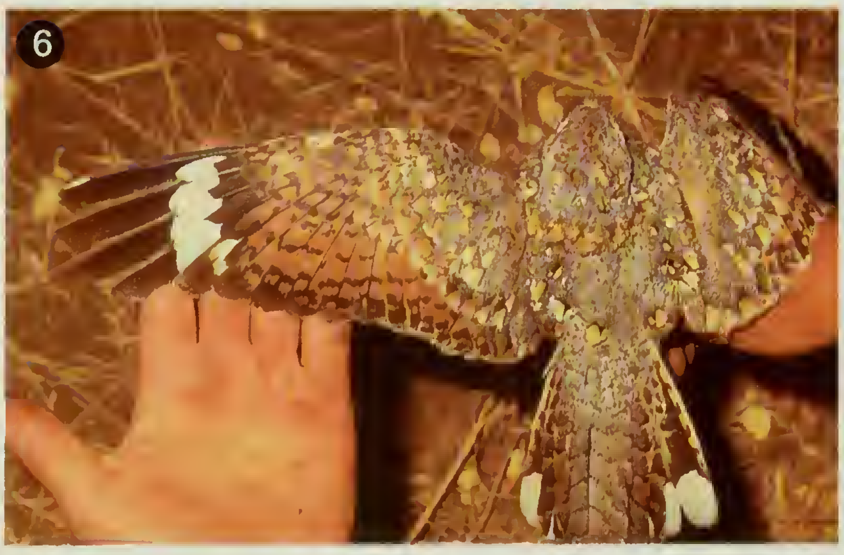












Captions are on page 121

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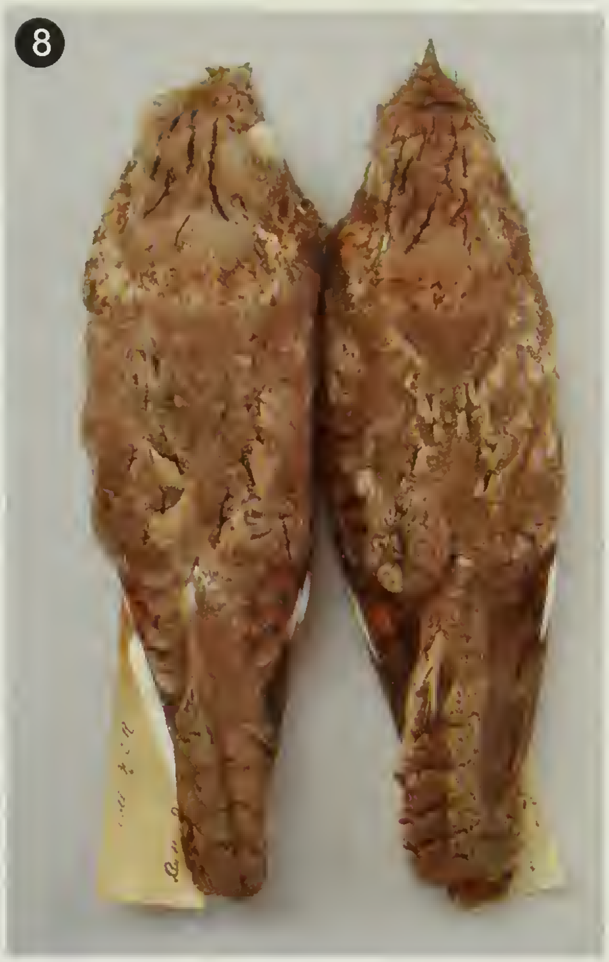

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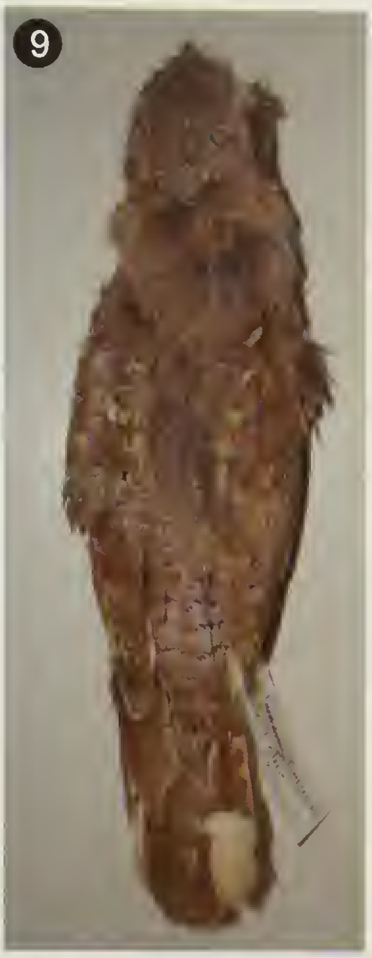

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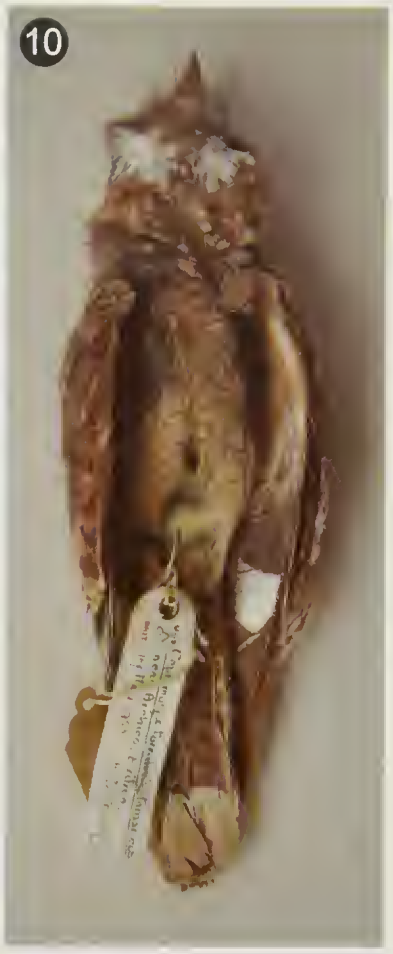

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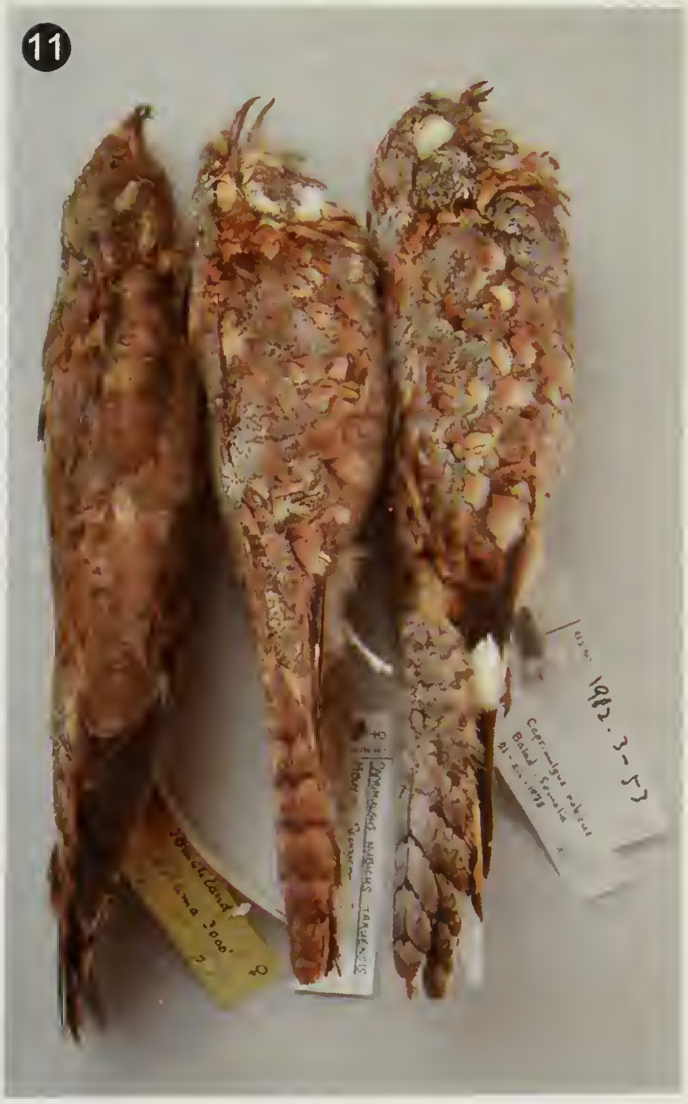

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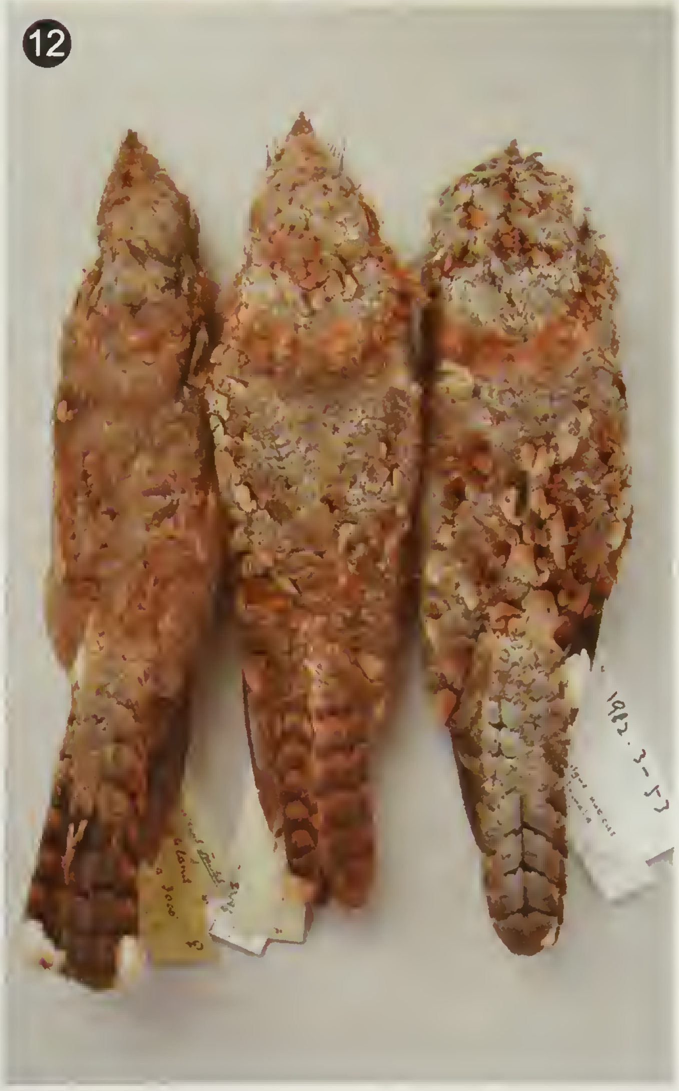

and wings perhaps intermediate between the two forms.

In addition, the breeding range and migratory status of *taruensis* are very poorly known, because as noted by both Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) and Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) there is very little evidence that it breeds in Kenya (the bulk of its purported range), and no definite information that it does so in southern Somalia, where it is generally considered to only occur south of 04°30'N (Ash & Miskell 1998). The possibility that *taruensis* and *torridus* overlap, perhaps even quite significantly, in their breeding ranges, which does not appear to have been suggested before, needs to be investigated and might assist explaining the degree of plumage overlap between the two taxa and, hence, the degree of difficulty that ornithologists have encountered in trying to delimit characters for their separation. Similarly, it is not impossible that some *jonesi* are breeding migrants to Socotra and also reach the range of *torridus* in their non-breeding period. Finally, the records in the central and western Sahara are anomalous and, if correct, presumably refer to vagrants or wandering birds.

Vocalisations

Seemingly, there are rather few recordings of Nubian Nightjar in existence, although the species is featured on Ranft & Cleere (1998), with a recording from Saudi Arabia (B. King), and I have also been able to examine recordings from Israel (S. Harrap), Yemen (P. Davidson) and Socotra (M. Evans, R. F. Porter & S. Aspinall). All closely match the species' typical double- or treble-noted song, which is somewhat reminiscent of a distant yapping dog, except those from Socotra, which are rather quiet but appear to be single-noted, although the recordists regarded them as identical to those in south-west Arabia. Fry & Harwin (1988) described identical vocalisations in Africa. Tristram (mentioned in Cleere & Nurney 1998 and Holyoak 2001) noted a call similar to that of European Nightjar *C. europaeus*, and Sherif M. Baha el Din (*in litt.* 2003) heard 'a low buzz or purr' from this species in flight during early evening at Gebel Elba, south-east Egypt.

Conclusion

Most previous authors have commented on the presence of well-marked differences in overall ground coloration between named populations of Nubian Nightjar, but in fact this only applies to *nubicus* and perhaps *tamaricis* (although see above), with all other subspecies being generally rather similar, displaying as much intra-form variation as that between subspecies, and *jonesi* and *taruensis* being, in my opinion, best regarded as not diagnosable. Like many cryptically plumaged ground-dwelling birds, the subspecies of Nubian Nightjar vary in ground coloration in response to overall humidity and soil colour, sometimes perhaps at a micro-scale. This makes the definition of subspecific limits particularly difficult and in some cases probably of relatively little real significance in determining evolutionary relationships and divergence. Especially when dealing with nocturnal birds, such as in the present case, it strengthens the necessity of focusing on vocalisations or molecular data as tools for elucidating meaningful divergence between different populations. Indeed, the importance of vocal characters in Caprimulgiform taxonomy was re-emphasised recently by Whitney *et al.* (2003), who demonstrated how a lack of such analysis could, in extreme cases, even lead to incorrect generic application. Nevertheless, whilst the use of such characters in taxonomy is important (see, e.g., the review by Alström & Ranft 2003), over-reliance on them may also have important implications in some groups of birds (Raposo & Höfling 2003), as the perceived importance of vocal characters, for instance, may be less clearly proven than often believed.

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